

Creating an elections committee

January 16th, 2010 by Don Marsh

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I am currently trying to create an elections committee from the sign up sheet that I had filled out at last month's cattle call at the Cabot Lodge. You may recall from a previous post that I had sent out a message to other people who had recently come to the Gainesville Tea Party organizational meetings. I asked anyone who was interested in serving on the elections committee to come out, and I got a mildly rowdy herd of opinionated individuals. I collected emails, and now that the holidays are over I have been trying to figure out what to do with them. I hardly know most of them and have since met some of them separately, but I have decided that the best thing I could do is to cull the herd with the Scarey Email approach. This is what I sent them:

I want to select members of the Elections Committee from the group that came to the original Cabot Lodge meeting. Since I still don't really know most of you, I am going to give you a chance to nominate yourself. Before you do so, let me tell you what I am looking for.

There are several functions of this committee. Each one will have someone who is the head of its own subcommittee. The head of that subcommittee will be responsible for one of the following functions:

- 1. Candidates. This will include vetting candidates for the purpose of endorsement and recruiting future candidates.*
- 2. Canvassing. Our endorsements are not empty statements. We will put ourselves to work getting out the message of approved candidates. This committee will recruit and train volunteers and keep track of the ground that has been covered.*
- 3. Phones. Doing call backs on people met during canvassing, and obtaining phone lists.*
- 4. Media. Recruit letter writers to the Sun, blogging, calling into local talk radio, internet forums, and press releases. Attend candidate forums and report on them.*
- 5. Materials. Make sure canvassers and GTP events have campaign literature for approved candidates, and clipboards and lists for collecting contact information.*

Please tell me why you find one of these incredibly compelling. Getting people elected is work. That is why our elected officials seldom represent the average citizen. People with vested interests tend to do these things. The average citizen is usually watching television while this is going on. Do we not have a vested interest in our republic??

Thanks. I await your response.

So far, I have yet to get a response. That means it was effective enough to eliminate those who may not be as committed as they need to be. Next, I will have to contact some of the ones I have gotten to know personally. Not everyone likes to communicate via email like I do, so a non-response does not automatically disqualify anyone, but it does keep people from saying, "I was never asked."

Since this group is still so new, and everyone but me seems to be inexperienced in elections, I can see that people are still working out some of the group's existential issues. Tea Parties have been largely about sounding off at elected officials and getting them to do the will of the protesters. They have not yet dealt with what you do when it doesn't work. In some parts of the country they are getting a handle on this, but I believe they



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SUGGESTED READING

I cannot recommend these books enough. One is a good guide to finding the boundaries of what is proper for political activists who are also Christians. The other is just plain thought-provoking!



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have had the opportunity because candidates have arisen for them to direct their energies; places like New Jersey and Virginia, and now the special election in Massachusetts and Scott Brown.

Here in Gainesville we have a Republican Congressman, Cliff Stearns, who has voted against the Stimulus Bill, Cap and Trade, and Health Care...and is unopposed at this time. All that Federal rage has no place to go. We are looking downstream, and culling out the good guys is harder down there. And all the ground work has to be done. This is much less appealing and seems less immediate. My job is to get people to look at the long range problems that occur from a lack of planning. And for that, I don't have Conservative radio's wind at my back.

Posted in Strategy

No comments »

MoveOn.org enters proxy war

January 12th, 2010 by Don Marsh

No comments »

[Watch this at Boston.com](#)

Ted Kennedy's vacant Senate seat is going to be filled next Tuesday, January 19th, and Democrats are in a panic to keep it in their control. Republican [Scott Brown](#) has been making his challenge to early favorite [Martha Coakley](#) interesting. Some polls have demonstrated that this special election is going to be a nail biter, but that is now being contested by other unnamed polls that supposedly show Coakley up by 11 points. I am inclined to believe that Coakley is in trouble because this is a special election, and non-November elections favor the most passionate players. Coakley will not be able to depend on typical default Democrats who come to the polls out of habit. I believe that is why the special elections in NJ and in Virginia were such slam dunks against the Democrats. Highly motivated Republicans and Tea Party activists are getting out the vote to save America from unpopular runaway spending in Washington.

Posted in Candidates

No comments »

Rules for Radicals, Part 5

January 12th, 2010 by Don Marsh

No comments »

This chapter was about communication. Alinsky's emphasis for the community organizer was that he should try to communicate with people in the community within their experience. He told a story about how he used an object lesson to make this point. He walked back and forth in front of the Biltmore Hotel attempting to give a \$10 bill away. People avoided him, or presumed he wanted change, or that he was a panhandler, or was soliciting women for prostitution. People at the Biltmore are not used to strangers trying to hand them a \$10 bill, so it confuses them. However, if you go down to the slums and do the same thing, they will take that \$10 all day long because they are accustomed to receiving handouts.

If you are completely alienated from the experiences of the people you are trying to reach, you will have to share that experience for a time until you can identify with them. It's very much like missionary work.

Posted in Rules for Radicals

No comments »

Where do voters come from?



High Springs citizens before a candidate forum

This is a continuation from my other series about elections. This one is about voters and what motivates them to come out, and how do they choose candidates?

Back in 2002 I did a lot of sign waving at busy intersections. It cost nothing to do this, and I was a candidate with little money, so it was something I could easily do to increase my visibility. I usually had some sort of message on my signs that was designed to imprint the passing motorists with either an issue I cared about, or one that dealt with my underdog status. One of the slogans that got the most honks and positive vibes said, "On election day, they count the votes, not the money". Below that sign was one of my yard signs that had my name followed by "Working people must be represented". I thought I had the kind of populist vibe that would transcend party lines. I thought I could win.

In spite of my rave reviews from the mobile peanut gallery that drove past me, I got burned on election day. It wasn't even close. So it goes to show you that you don't get a good reading of the pulse of the people merely by selecting your polling group from those who smiled at you and waved. I have no idea how many of these people voted in my election, or even lived in the county.

A few years after that, I was running a local elections web site in which I let every candidate get his message out for free. I called the local candidates to personally invite them to submit their information. I spoke to one county judge candidate who told me that he didn't need to use my site because he was clearly the most qualified candidate. I urged him to present himself anyway because, "this is an election, not a job interview. No matter how qualified you are, if people don't like you, they will not vote for you." And this somber fellow went down in defeat to his smiling family-man opponent.

Just last year I spoke with a candidate who was running in a very competitive local race. I asked him if he wanted to blog on my local elections site or if he was going to make some youtube videos that I could embed there. He told me that he had some polling data that showed him in the lead. And if it wasn't broke, he wasn't going to fix it. I was surprised at this because I thought he was in the fight of his life. I turned out to be right. He lost in the only poll that really matters.

I believe our low voter turnout in city elections shows clearly that voters will only vote for you if they have a reason. And a city election tends to give you the least information. There is no CNN pounding away at you day in and day out telling you what disaster is about to befall your city if such and such happens. The Gainesville Sun does a pathetic job of covering local elections. And since it is a non-partisan race, there is no D or R after someone's name to give the uninformed voter a clue. And since there is no "important" race at the top of the ticket to draw them out, voters who might vote for you as an afterthought won't be there. Only the most informed and energized show up. The people

with a real REASON to vote.

Coming to the place where you understand that there is no mystery, no secret cabal, no vast conspiracy to rig elections is just the starting place. People vote for a reason. You must give them a reason, but not just one. Single issue candidates seldom prevail. That's because the public is not a monolith, all sharing one voting brain. The public is made up of many factions with different interests. Indeed, each voter is a patchwork of different interests. It may take one reason for your neighbor to vote for you, but it may take a completely unrelated reason for someone down the street to vote for you. And you may need them both.

In short, you need a menu of reasons for people to vote for you. And then you will need to deliver this reason into their hands. And you may need to do it repeatedly. THIS is the reason elections require so much money. Communications are costly. A candidate who raises a ton of cash is not necessarily corrupt. It's just good planning. A candidate who does not raise enough money is handicapping himself.

In recent years I have seen a lot of campaigns that provide almost no information. A bullet list of organizations you have belonged to, and a focus-group-tested slogan is just not enough of a reason for people to vote. But people who are motivated and inspired and feel a vested interest in your issues don't need to be begged to remember your name.

Posted in [Admin speaks](#) , [Analysis](#)

[No comments »](#)

Rules for Radicals, Part 4

January 6th, 2010 by Don Marsh

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In the fourth chapter, "The Education of an Organizer," Alinsky candidly admits that there have been more failures than successes in his career as an educator of community organizers. And he quite candidly admits that it is bad for marriages, fidelity, and chastity. In short, all must be sacrificed for the organization. And even then, you may suffer betrayal and disappointment within the community you are organizing. But, since it's all for the cause and you are expendable anyway, let's look at the characteristics that he says are valuable.

1. Curiosity
2. Irreverence. (Alinsky despises dogma.)
3. Imagination. (After all, you will have to invent an organization from the raw materials of the community you find.)
4. Sense of humor.
5. A bit of blurred vision of a better world.
6. An organized personality. (Self discipline.)
7. Ego.
8. A free and open mind and political relativity.

What this really boils down to is making the organization your life. And you persevere through everything that this challenge throws at you because in the end this will be whatever you have made it. Personally, I find this a bit depressing because in order for someone to become like this, he has to synthesize all the varied political interests into one forward moving blob. He will have to be fairly two-faced to tell each part what they want to hear. Everyone has to agree to support things they don't care about so that their concern will get attention from others who don't care about THAT. In short, this leader is an unelected, self-declared politician.

Posted in [Rules for Radicals](#)

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Rules for Radicals, Part 3

January 3rd, 2010 by Don Marsh

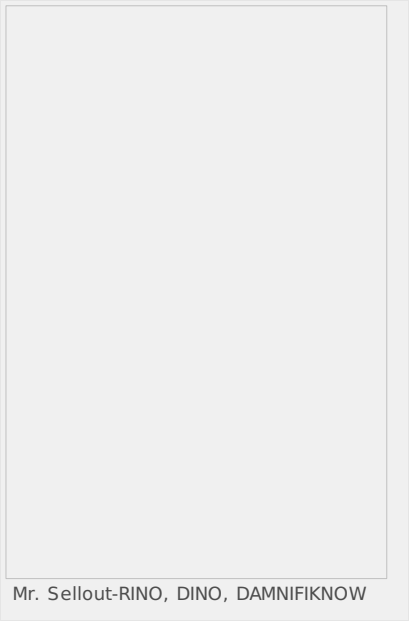
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Chapter 3 was about words, and how sanitizing the language of politics leads to inactivity. There are certain words which reveal our squeamishness about politics, just by the way we use them. Here they are.

- 1. **Power.** Strictly speaking, it is merely the ability to get things done. Yes, power can corrupt you, but so can food, money, sex, admiration, but all of these things have perfectly healthy applications, or else life is not much worth living. People who fastidiously eschew power are being very careful not to get anything done. They glory in their victimhood and demonize people who do things. Is this healthy?
- 2. **Self-interest.** Everybody has one. Pretending that you don't, and that you are morally superior because you don't, is pretentious and useless. Even if you are most concerned about others who are in need, THAT is your self-interest. Failing to pursue it reduces your cause to mere wishful thinking. Those in need who you care about would not appreciate that. Self-interest also changes alliances. We were for the Communist Soviet Union in WW2 before we were against them after the war. Our self-interest had changed.
- 3. **Compromise.** Many times this is couched to mean a betrayal of ideals. To those who compromise, it may be just an incremental step in the right direction. He will get more next time.
- 4. **Ego.** It is not all about self-aggrandizement. Ego is also the belief in your power to create situations, alliances, progress. Without ego, you are passive and reactive.
- 5. **Conflict.** There are all levels of conflict, which can be violent and undesirable, or it can be the normal friction of working out our differences and finding agreements.

Accepting the positive definitions of these words, and allowing yourself to apply them to your desired ends helps you to have the moral authority to proceed in the face of opposition. And there will be opposition.

What do winning candidates have in common?



This is the promised continuation of a post about winning candidates. We are moving on to the things they have in common. I will begin by saying that the number one thing is that they get the most votes. I know what you are saying: “No kidding, Don! That’s not news!” On an intellectual level it’s not news, but to see how candidates behave on the local level, it is hard to grasp the idea. And it’s even less apparent that the voters know this when so many opt out and stay home.

I believe that there are some things that lead to winning, and I have a case study for us in the form of Alachua County Commissioner Lee Pinkoson. I met Lee during the 2002 county commission race, when we were both first time candidates. I like Lee. He is a very friendly guy. I cannot say that I have followed his career on the commission closely enough to know exactly where I stand on my opinion of him as an elected official, but I do

have personal knowledge of what important moves he made to get himself elected. Lee will not likely approve of what I am going to say, but I am just using this as a way to tell us how to get people elected. You probably won’t approve of what I am going to say, either.

When Lee first submitted his paperwork to be a candidate, I called him on the phone. I saw, on the Supervisor of Elections web site that he was running in a different district from

mine, and that he was running as an Independent. I had heard that he was a lifelong Republican, and I wanted to know what led him to run as an Independent. He told me that he wanted to be a commissioner for ALL the people. And he didn't want to offend anyone. Well, I was a member of the Republican Exec Committee at the time, and I told him that I was offended and that other Republicans would probably not vote for him either. I don't remember what else was said after that, but some time later I went back to the SOE website and saw that Lee had taken my advice to heart and had switched his party affiliation to...DEMOCRAT! This was not what I had in mind.

Suffice it to say that Lee had done the pragmatic thing. He considered the lay of the land. He knew the county was mostly Democrat, and that he would be the recipient of a lot of Default-Democrat votes in November that he would not even have to work for. However, he had also gotten himself into a Primary with a Democrat incumbent. He would have to get through a race in which only Democrats could vote. Throughout the campaign, it was an issue that he was a newly minted Democrat. At one of our candidate forums, I recall that he was directly challenged to tell what caused him to switch. He said that it was the Bush administration's sanctioning of the drilling in ANWAR that was the last straw for him.

I have no idea if Lee was sincere or not, but he sure sounded like it. But what helped him win his close primary against Dave Newport (51.48% to 48.52%) was an incendiary issue that drove voter turnout that was angry at Newport for his support of the Comprehensive Land Use Plan that had people in the unincorporated area screaming. That, and his campaign begged a lot of Republicans and Independents to register Democrat so they could vote in the primary. Lee comes from a wealthy family and was well connected in the area, so he had the organization to get this done. The result: in November he slew another lifelong Republican, Susan Carter in a 60-40 route.

So, there are 3 things that led to this big win for a first timer:

1. Picked the path of least resistance. He ran as a major party candidate in a place where that party had a big majority.
2. He rode a hot issue that painted a target on the incumbent's back.
3. He had resources to organize what he had.

I believe that if Lee had stayed an independent, he would have been in a three-way race with Dave Newport and Susan Carter, and Dave Newport would have been re-elected in a plurality. Susan lost the last time because an independent got in her race and kept her from having a shot at Mike Byerly alone. And that is why Byerly is a multi-term incumbent today.

The next installment in this series will be about the voters themselves.

Posted in Analysis , Candidates

No comments »

The Power of Remaining a Local Movement

December 31st, 2009 by Don Marsh

[1 comment »](#)

This in from the Raw Story blog:

Revelations about the connections between a Republican lobbying firm with a long history of astroturfing and one of the two main factions of "Tea Party" protesters are raising fresh concerns that the GOP has successfully hijacked the right-wing Tea Party movement.

More on this and an accompanying Rachel Maddow video hit piece [here](#).

I know this is at the last minute as I am trying to leave the house and go to work, but I had to deal with it right away.

I am incredibly wary of getting tied up with any national movement. Doing so has a tendency to shift the work of political action to those in higher places. This will never do. The Tea Party movement, if it is to remain viable, must be one that gets people involved in local politics. After all, if they show up for all the hometown stuff, they will already be in

place for the national issues and candidates on an as-needed basis.

Our country is in the mess that it is largely because we have been happy to sleep through the political process while we delegate all concern to the few who are willing to participate. And most of those people are leftists who love big government and grandiose Utopian visions of saving the world through massive wealth redistribution. It begins as politics and persuasion and ends as force.

Our involvement must be independent, yet flexible enough to swing which ever way benefits US, and not just a particular party. And sometimes that will mean we will vote Republican. But as an independent movement, we will be able to choose outside of that box when we feel that it serves our interest to do so.

We must also be a local movement, HEAVILY involved in local elections. This keeps us alert all year round, which is exactly the kind of eternal vigilance our Forefathers told us about. It's good for us, good for America, and bad for those who seek to use us.

Posted in [Admin speaks](#) , [Strategy](#)

[1 comment »](#)

Rules for Radicals, Part 2

December 31st, 2009 by [Don Marsh](#)

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Chapter 2 is all about the moral question, “Does the end justify the means?” Alinsky says that the more correct question to ask is whether a particular end justifies a particular means. And he makes the case persuasively that different values can be assigned, and have been assigned, to the same means by the same people, according to what is at stake and how many other choices you have. In this chapter he lists 10 different rules that govern Ends-Means judgment calls:

1. Your concern with ends-means ethics varies with your personal concern and your proximity to the conflict.
2. The judgment of ethics is dependent on the political position of those sitting in judgment.
3. In war the end justifies almost any means.
4. Judgment of the End-Means ethics can take place only in the context of their times.
5. Concern with ethics increases with the number of means available.
6. The less import the end, the more you can afford to engage in ethical evaluations.
7. Success or failure is a strong determinant of ethics.
8. The morality of a decision varies in whether it takes place during a time of imminent victory or imminent defeat.
9. Any effective means is judged as unethical by its opposition.
10. Do what you can with what you have and clothe it in morality.
11. Goals must be phrased in general terms, ie “No Taxation Without Representation”

He gives a lot of interesting examples from history, and largely condemns inactivity and passivity as being evil.

(I realize I said in a previous post that I would continue on that particular subject, and I will. I am just trying to do a few things at once.)

Posted in [Rules for Radicals](#)

[No comments »](#)

Rules for Radicals, Part 1

December 30th, 2009 by [Don Marsh](#)

[No comments »](#)

The book, "Rules for Radicals," by Saul Alinsky, has been recommended to members of the Gainesville Tea Party. I recently got it from the public library. I am reading it now, and I will comment on the book as I ingest its content. Saul Alinsky is someone whose writings have influenced Barack Obama and other of our present leftist radicals in America. This book was recommended because the tactics are supposedly transferable to the cause of people who oppose the left. I am examining the concept as I go.

The prologue is immediately preceded by a quote from Alinsky, who salutes Lucifer as the first radical who at least succeeded in getting his own kingdom. That may be enough to put some of you off right away, but I took this as a challenge. And the prologue itself is an exhortation to work within the system and to take the long view, with which I already agree. He recalls how 60s radicals have blown opportunities by protesting for protest's sake when it was time to negotiate and how violence is a form of failure. Still no argument here.

The first chapter tells of the purpose of the book and contrasts it to "The Prince," which was Machiavelli's advice to the Haves on how to exercise power. This is to be Alinsky's advice to the Have-nots, about how to take power back. This is a fairly theoretical chapter about the nature of Change and Revolution, which will always be happening and is the enemy of Dogma, which only serves the Haves. This is the somewhat one-sided story of breaking down privilege, whether it is earned or not. There is no distinction. The need is everything, which is the antithesis of Ayn Rand's "Atlas Shrugged," which vilifies the need-driven society, which sacrifices all talent and creativity for the most utilitarian existence.

Revolution is the province of the Have-nots because the Haves only glorify the Revolutions of the Past, and the further past that they are, the better. Revolutions threaten the status quo of the Haves, so the poor do not look to them for guidance. They look to the radical, the community organizer, who will marshal their numbers to get the wealth of the Haves. The Have-nots are motivated by need and the Haves by greed. But with the help of the Have-a-little-want-mores, the Haves can overcome the Have-nots. Those people in the middle really make or break a Revolution in America, because they are the real majority, and they are conflicted.

My variance with Alinsky so far is that this is all economic. The Haves and Have-nots in America are largely a matter of self-perception. You can be one of the Have-nots in America and still be complacent and satisfied, just as you can be full of angst and despair and be living in a Beverly Hills mansion. I believe that beliefs and transcendency play a vital role in our society, but only so long as the people are spiritual. If the people become totally materialistic, making all their judgments in dollars, we do become a jungle, and it's just a matter of community organizers learning how to do the math.

Stay tuned...

Posted in [Rules for Radicals](#)

No comments »

